

# UNAMIR

## Mission to Rwanda

By R. A. DALLAIRE and B. POULIN

In early 1993, the U.N. Secretary General drew attention to the tragedy befalling Rwanda. In June the Security Council passed resolution 846 authorizing a U.N. Observer Mission Uganda-Rwanda (UNOMUR) which began operations in July with approximately a hundred military and civilian personnel. Its primary task was to ensure that no military assistance reached the Rwandan rebels—the Front Patriotique Rwandais—across the Uganda border. In August, the belligerents signed the Arusha peace agreement which, it was hoped, would bring peace. Its goals included installing a broad-based transitional government (BBTG); establishing transitional institutions; deploying a neutral international force; withdrawing all foreign troops; integrating the gendarmerie; disengaging, disarming, and demobilizing both parties; and protecting the expatriate community. The

goals were intended to culminate in elections some twenty-two months later.

Unfortunately, the UNOMUR mandate to prevent weapons from entering the country did little to abate human suffering. In fact, the situation continued to deteriorate because of the massive displaced population, drought, famine, poor public health, and declining national revenues. Large refugee influxes from Rwanda into neighboring Burundi were also a chief concern. Accordingly, the Security Council adopted resolution 872 in October 1993 authorizing a contingent consisting of some 2,500 military personnel known as the U.N. Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR).<sup>1</sup>

UNAMIR had a multifaceted mandate and a concept of operations with four phases. The first phase (October 5, 1993–January 4, 1994) promoted the installation and opera-

### Summary

Efforts by the United Nations to intervene in Rwanda illustrate how hesitancy and impotence on the part of some sovereign nations leave victims of many humanitarian disasters contemptuous of the international community. The U.N. Observer Mission Uganda-Rwanda (UNOMUR) braved a disintegrating political situation that generated masses of refugees and fueled deep ethnic tensions compounded by drought and famine. A new mandate established the U.N. Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) which achieved some of its goals, especially in coordinating humanitarian aid with civilian agencies. But the late arrival of personnel, scant resources, and a lack of international resolve led to a view of the United Nations as a paper tiger and contributed to the death of a half million people. While withdrawal would have been tantamount to endorsing genocide, the lesson of Rwanda is too-little-too-late from a world organization with serious faults.

The views expressed in this article are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Canadian Department of National Defence, the Canadian Government, or any agency of the United Nations.

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**the mission and the Rwandans fell victim to inflated expectations that the United Nations could not fulfill**

*The Globe and Mail, Toronto (Corrine Dufta)*

**Maj Gen Dallaire (right) with fellow peacekeepers and friends.**

**Major General R. A. Dallaire is Deputy Commander of the Canadian Army; he was chief military observer for UNOMUR and commanded UNAMIR; Captain B. Poulin serves as African regional officer in the Directorate of International Policy, Canadian Department of National Defence.**

tion of a BBTG. Specifically, it assisted in ensuring the security of Kigali as well as demilitarizing the area in and around the city, helping in mine clearance, providing security for repatriation of Rwandan refugees and displaced persons, coordinating humanitarian assistance in conjunction with relief operations, investigating alleged noncompliance with provisions of the peace accord, and monitoring security leading to democratic elections. The second phase (January 5–April 4, 1994) involved preparations to disengage, demobilize, and integrate government and rebel

forces. The third phase (January 5–April 4, 1995) was to be characterized by the actual disengagement, demobilization, and integration of both parties. The last phase (January 5–November 4, 1995) called for providing security in the run up to elections. Interestingly, the operation also saw an unprecedented degree of cooperation with civilian agencies that had the front-line job of providing humanitarian aid which resulted in an attractive and cost-effective way of facilitating the operation and advancing the spirit of Arusha.

### **The Mission**

At first glance the UNAMIR mandate seemed feasible, and the force did acquit itself well, all things considered. Several constraints made it clear, however, that the mandate and timetable jeopardized the ability of UNAMIR to fulfil its mission as originally en-



M-113A2 rolling onto ramp at Entebbe, Uganda.



The Chairman visiting U.N. contingent.

Combat Camera Imagery (Lemuel Cassilas)



Canadians arriving via Air National Guard C-5 Galaxy.

Combat Camera Imagery (Marvin Krause)

Combat Camera Imagery (Chris U. Putnam)

visaged. For example, the October 4 resolution called for some 2,500 U.N. personnel, yet the force did not completely arrive until late February. To further complicate matters, some arrived without minimum equipment.

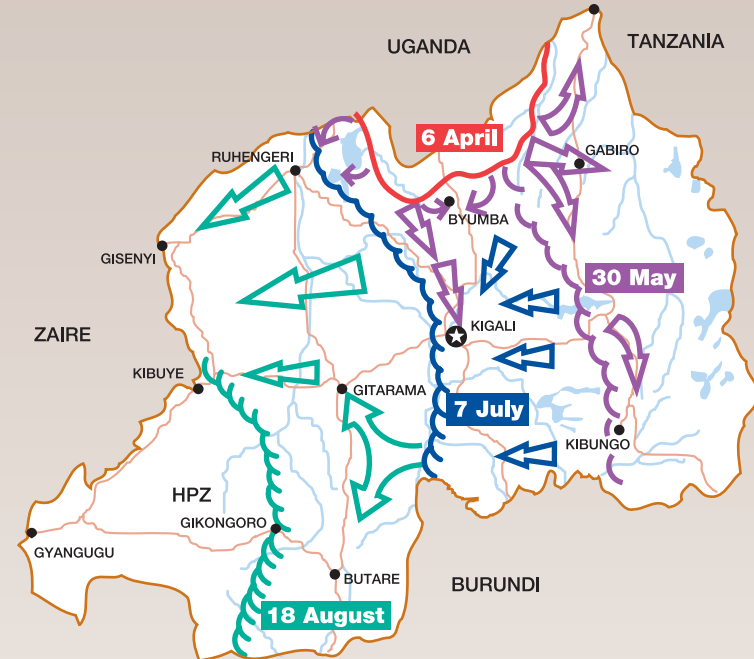
This problem was partly due to the overall pressure under which the United Nations had to respond to a number of international crises during 1992–93 without a commensurate expansion of resources from member states, and also due to the limited field operations staff in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) at the United Nations. In the case of Rwanda, this resulted in problems over deployment time and budget, not to mention the paucity of air transport (both fixed-wing and rotary). Such deficiencies weakened the effectiveness of UNAMIR

in mediating as well as reconciling differences among the two parties and also precluded developing and implementing a structured peace process. In other words, the mission and the Rwandans which the operation was intended to secure fell victim to inflated expectations that the United Nations could not fulfil. This explains in part how a classical peacekeeping mission degenerated into a resumption of the conflict and how new human rights abuses based on political decapitation degenerated into genocide.

### Raising the Stakes

The first signs of this crisis surfaced in April 1994 when the Rwandan president died under mysterious circumstances in a plane crash. Fighting broke out among government forces followed by murders as the situation rapidly gave way to increasing lawlessness, violence, and mass killing across most of the country. The hands of the United Nations were also tied; and since it possessed no power akin to that of a sovereign state, it could only act with the consent of the international community under the auspices of

### Rwanda: The Rebel Advance



Source: Canadian National Defence Headquarters

### Refugee/Displaced Persons Camps



Source: Canadian National Defence Headquarters

were engaged in a civil war and UNAMIR had only 2,500 poorly trained troops. At best, U.N. presence provided local security for the roughly 20,000 Rwandans caught between the lines, helped preserve truces and cease-fires, assisted both civilian agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), held ground, and prepared the way for a new force and an increased humanitarian effort.

The situation was also exacerbated by decisions on the part of some contributing countries to either withdraw military personnel from UNAMIR unilaterally or not amend the mandate under what were significantly changed circumstances, namely a state of war instead of peace. Thus as the United Nations debated a new mandate and increases in personnel, the UNAMIR force—with little or no ammunition and barely a third of the minimum operational equipment needed in theater, hardly any defense stores, and one of its major contingents (Belgians) deliberately being targeted by one of the warring factions—actually decreased from 2,500 to 450 troops through a decision by the Security Council which reinforced the impression of the United Nations as a paper tiger.

Despite these setbacks, a complete withdrawal from Rwanda was out of the question since the belligerents would have perceived it as a green light for a more deliberate, intolerable escalation of hostilities. It became clear that the term *international community* had become a pejorative for both sides. Ironically, while U.N. credibility was being eroded daily by its ineffectiveness in the face of massacres and ongoing fighting, it remained the only conduit for the two sides to communicate and for an objective projection of the Rwandan situation around the world. Also, unlike other international organizations, the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross held firm.

### The Response

The international community finally responded to the request by the Secretary General and approved expansion of the U.N. mandate and operations in Rwanda. The Security Council passed resolution 918 in May followed by resolution 955 in June which authorized a UNAMIR force of 5,500 troops with

the Security Council. As long as the individual members of this body procrastinated and pursued national agendas, the organization remained relatively powerless. Consequently, little could be done to deter fighting from spreading throughout the country given that some 60,000 government and rebel soldiers

a more proactive humanitarian protection and support mandate. In fact, the mandate provided for creating secure areas to protect refugees and displaced persons, supporting and securing the distribution of relief supplies, and imposing an arms embargo against Rwanda. It also called for an immediate cease-fire and end to violence.

But once again the required personnel and equipment were not forthcoming. For instance, the United Nations was not given assets to counter the inflammatory broadcasts from the nominally independent Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines which was controlled by the so-called interim government. These broadcasts were largely responsible for spreading panic that, in turn, drove large numbers of people to refugee camps in neighboring states, thereby spreading instability throughout the region. The broadcasts also excited the Hutu population to take up arms against Tutsis and Hutu moderates to exterminate them and, also, regularly targeted UNAMIR in general and its senior officials in particular. This last development raised tensions between U.N. personnel and the large Hutu population, which complicated the mediation process. It also should be pointed out that the broadcasts discouraged survivors from returning to their homes in Rwanda and should have been jammed. The United Nations should have aired counter-broadcasts to give the population a clear account of what was actually happening as it did in Cambodia. Yet, unlike Cambodia, no country came forward to offer jamming or broadcasting assets.

Another example of the lack of resources was the refugee camps. There was no concerted effort by the international community to disarm refugees or segregate extremists from the general population which moved across the border into the camps. It was clear that aside from refugees in and around Goma, most refugees and certainly a majority of displaced persons in the southwest were victims of world apathy. This benign neglect was caused by the media which as a whole opted to dispatch their reporters to Goma, which helped alleviate the misery there at the expense of the rest of the country. Second, with only aid to Goma being publicized, protagonists interested in destabi-



French soldiers  
watching materiel  
being unloaded.

Combat Camera Imagery (Andy Dunaway)

lizing Rwanda spread the word that one must flee the country to obtain the means to survive, from food to medical care.

Ironically, the net effect of providing aid to this area was a continual increase in the already large numbers of refugees arriving there and considerable tension in the southwest that could have resulted in another exodus of more than a million Rwandans towards Bukavu. Needless to say, these developments further strained the already scant resources. Finally, this concentration of aid hampered the U.N. effort to convince the same refugees to go home and displaced persons to stay.

French-led coalition forces did stabilize the southwest; but that temporary intervention must be compared with the lack of support which the U.N. mission received in attempting to get the revised UNAMIR operation off the ground for a second time. It would have been preferable to see these efforts channelled differently, say towards the UNAMIR mission itself. If this had occurred, the entire operation would have been shorter and more effective.



In hindsight the international community reacted too late to the burgeoning refugee situation and too late to stop genocide. Moreover, the refugee camps, concentrated in extremely precarious locations and replete with extremists, will play a key role in Rwanda's future. They will hinder the Rwandan government from re-establishing itself to the point where it can deal with the challenges of the present, let alone those of the future.

In August 1994 a cease-fire was declared, albeit unilaterally by the rebel side. Continued reluctance by the international community, however, either to help or to direct the United Nations to be more proactive in areas surrounding Rwanda will be disastrous. The inability of various commissions (for example,

genocide and human rights) to safely conduct a balanced investigation of the camps akin to that inside Rwanda, and a lack of technical and financial support for the new government to create

a semblance of a judicial process, gendarmerie, civil service, and schools, will only increase the chances of failure and suffering. The major difference this time, however, is that if the situation is not rectified the whole region will be affected as opposed to only Rwanda.

The international community must be capable of responding operationally, administratively, and logistically to humanitarian crises like Rwanda rapidly and effectively. Organizing a plans and policy branch within the United Nations to conduct forward planning and providing the staff for contingency planning would be useful. One should bear in mind that an embryonic cell exists in DPKO with many similar features, and it might fit the bill if expanded. Along with these measures, the United Nations needs greater access to resources for field operations, possibly through something similar to a NATO mobile force to which member countries contribute troops on a rotational basis for one or two years. A small permanent headquarters staff could be deployed to the field with standard operating procedures and contingency planning, together with

earmarked forces that have undergone combined exercises with integrated communications equipment.

U.N. headquarters, for its part, needs authority to rapidly respond to crises with a mission-specific implementation plan developed by an adroit, reconstituted political staff. The bottom line is that sovereign nations must adapt to the new world by allowing the United Nations to do things that they do not or cannot do individually for various geopolitical reasons. This would facilitate a response to an unfolding crisis in weeks rather than months. By the same token, this approach would help preclude repeating the lesson of Rwanda, where a terrible price was extracted because the response had to be improvised.

JFQ

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> UNOMUR was administratively integrated into UN-AMIR at that time; it was disbanded in September 1994 with most of its personnel and equipment transferred to UNAMIR.

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